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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/RSP, EAP/MLS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECIN](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE - THAI PERSPECTIVES

REF: A. STATE 156638

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 5017

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton. Reason 1.4(b,d)

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: MFA officials have provided us background on Thai government attitudes regarding Asia/Pacific regional institutions and architecture. Overall, the RTG views the principal regional forums (ASEAN, ASEAN Plus Three, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and now the East Asia Summit (EAS)) as parts of an evolving security structure that is creating "overlapping communities" in Asia that the Thai hope will contain the "competitive forces" between the regions major powers, build trust and increase economic prosperity in the region. The Thais see the evolving structure -- leading eventually to an "East Asia Community" -- as an opportunity to demonstrate regional leadership and clearly want the U.S. to remain engaged as closely as possible in regional institutions. END SUMMARY.

[12.](#) (C) Using reftel talking points and questions, poloff discussed Thai attitudes regarding existing and emerging Asia/Pacific regional institutions and architecture with Suriya Chindawongse, Linna Tangkatath and Prangtip Kongridhisuksakorn from the ASEAN Affairs Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

EAST ASIA SUMMIT (EAS)

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[13.](#) (C) According to the MFA officers, observer status is not being discussed for the EAS. There has not been a decision made on Russia's desire to participate in this and future meetings as ASEAN has not been able to reach consensus on the issue. The RTG supports Moscow's desire to join, however. Consensus on the frequency of the EAS has not been reached, but the RTG supports having the meeting every two years (vice three). MFA officials insisted that ASEAN remains the "driving force" in the EAS process and will endeavor to remain in control.

[14.](#) (C) The Thais believe the EAS will overlap to some degree with the ARF and APEC, but they view the EAS as more focused on "strategic issues," and a forum for the regions leaders to get together to "brainstorm." MFA officers claimed they are not concerned that the EAS will distract from APEC, ARF or other existing regional forums but rather will "reinforce" these institutions. The EAS will follow the context of ASEAN plus three, thereby excluding Taiwan.

ASEAN

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[15.](#) (C) MFA officials described ASEAN's strategic relations with China, Japan, and South Korea as developing "very well." They noted that the more closely ASEAN works with China the more interested the Japanese become in engagement with ASEAN (and vice versa) -- leading to a "snowballing" of substantive political engagement between ASEAN and the regional powers. They said they are considering deepening relations with India and are "working on" relations with Russia. They indicated that relations with the EU remain a more "complicated" issue but did not elaborate. They assured poloff that the relationship with the U.S. is among ASEAN's top priorities, pointing to the success of the U.S./ASEAN dialogue and the enhanced partnership with the U.S. through the ASEAN Cooperation Plan.

[16.](#) (C) The Thais claim they are eager to expand regional economic integration to include North Asia and that Foreign Minister Kantathi has called for a 2012 target date. ASEAN plans to move forward with negotiations with China and Japan on FTAs that will serve as the basis for the economic community, and hope to do so at a more rapid pace. MFA officials claimed that Singapore also supported Thai efforts to accelerate FTAs and regional economic integration.

[17.](#) (C) MFA officers indicated that the central ASEAN principle of "non-interference" was open to limited re-interpretation due to the realities of transnational issues impacting the region and said democracy promotion remained one of ASEAN's goals.

[18.](#) (C) RTG officials said they are interested in expanding

outreach to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), viewing the SCO as another regional "confidence building forum." They are particularly interested in possible "lessons learned" from SCO on counterterrorism issues. "EAST ASIA COMMUNITY"

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19. (C) The Thais view ASEAN Plus Three as the main forum for building an "East Asia Community." Building such a grouping will be a gradual process, undertaken through sectoral cooperation, that will be built on and linked to ASEAN Plus Three and the EAS. The goal of the Community is to promote greater trust and economic progress for the region and stability in the security environment. The Thais hope the evolving security structures will create "overlapping communities" in Asia that will contain the "competitive forces" between the regions major powers (read China and Japan). The Thais described their vision of having ASEAN, the EAS and the future East Asian Community serve as the three main processes in regional integration.

COMMENT

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10. (C) The Thais obviously see the evolving architecture in Asia as an opportunity to demonstrate regional leadership. The MFA officials, however, could not clearly articulate Thailand's role in a East Asia Community or what eventual structure such a community would have. The Thais also seem eager to expand their ambitious political goals into the economic sphere but it is not clear how they will accomplish them. Our normal trade policy interlocutors have not taken such an optimistic position on regional economic integration and seem intent of focusing on bilateral approaches. The Thais clearly want the U.S. to remain engaged as closely as possible in regional institutions and emphasized that these groupings would not be exclusive, emphasizing that "our fate is tied with the rest of the world." END COMMENT

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